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Testimony in Support of Raised Bill No. 6666, Section 7

An act requiring school districts to utilize Board Certified Behavior Analysts when an individual education plan includes applied behavior analytic services for a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleishmann and Members of the Education Committee. My name is Amanda Tellier and I appreciate the opportunity to offer testimony and ask you to **support House Bill 6666, Section 7**. I am the parent of two children who receive special education under IEPs in Connecticut. My daughter Alison is fortunate. She qualifies for special education due to speech impairment. Alison receives 3 hours per week of direct service with a licensed Speech & Language Pathologist (SLP). According to the *Connecticut Guidelines for Speech and Language Programs*, "under Connecticut SLP licensure statute and regulations and codes of ethics of national and state professional associations, the SLP has legal authority and ethical responsibility for overseeing the design, implementation and supervision of such speech and language services." So, the State has provided me and my school district with reasonable assurance that my daughter's IEP will be carried out by highly qualified personnel with recognized expertise in the field. My son is not so fortunate.

Caleb has Asperger's Syndrome, an autism spectrum disorder. He requires behavior analytic services in order to receive educational benefit. His disability is complex and pervasive and his educational program must be implemented by qualified personnel. In his case, as with many other children with ASD, **the most qualified personnel to oversee the design, implementation, and supervision of his behavior analytic services are Board Certified Behavior Analysts**. However, unlike my daughter's SLP, and every other professional discipline that works with children with special needs, **the State offers no means of assuring parents and school districts that those providers identifying themselves as behavior analysts have adequate training or an appropriate professional credential.**

I testified before this committee a year ago in support of teacher training on ASD instructional strategies. At that time, Caleb was excluded from school and denied a free appropriate public education for over six months. We were in the midst of a due process hearing arguing for what Federal law mandates and this new bill will support - researched based interventions provided by trained/certified professionals. **Instructional strategies based upon Applied Behavior Analysis are the only research-based interventions proven effective with children on the autism spectrum.** Many parents are insisting on behavior analytic programming and will not settle for untrained or unqualified service providers.

Caleb's school district did not provide the behavioral, social, and academic supports Caleb required. In fact, it was their "autism program" that failed him. Other special education schools, that the district advised would be appropriate, could not offer the kind of data driven, positive behavioral interventions that Caleb needed in a supportive environment with appropriate peers. Caleb fit nowhere until we found a classroom at the Connecticut Center for Child Development over 50 miles from our home. His placement at CCCD was ordered by the Hearing Officer while his district is also required to develop a program for Caleb in Bristol under the direction of a Board Certified Behavior Analyst. Like other parents, I have spent several years and thousands of dollars advocating for the "free and appropriate" education Caleb now receives. In one year at CCCD, under the supervision of a BCBA and with appropriately trained teaching staff, Caleb has made significant progress socially, emotionally, academically and behaviorally - and he enjoys school again.

The quality of a child's education should not depend on how well their parent can advocate or whether they can afford an attorney. It should depend on research based interventions provided by highly-qualified providers like Board Certified Behavior Analysts. Too many children with autism spectrum disorders in Connecticut are not receiving appropriate services for lack of qualified staff within school districts. However, the resources do currently exist in Connecticut as the supply of credentialed behavior analysts has significantly increased over the last 7 years. Additionally, there are mechanisms in place to continue that growth through the availability of over 190 on-line and on-campus programs as well as traditional college courses now available nationwide. **The State Department of Education should recognize the national certification program for behavior analysts, and mandate that school districts follow the existing protocols in place for related service providers.** Thank you and please support this legislation.